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ABSTRACT

Young students not impressed in mind and heart by their school's curricula are likely to be influenced by the media with which they amuse themselves. Video arcade games and television suffused with militarism and violence will help them create their own culture and develop their own values. They may begin to believe nothing can be done to ensure the survival of the world. If minorities are invisible in the curriculum, children will believe that difference and otherness must be shunned. Curriculum developers who are willing to reconceptualize have the opportunity to interpret diversity of culture and experience so that children learn from and appreciate their own culture, while at the same time affirming and learning from the cultures of other people. Laying the groundwork for the study of global peace in the classroom assists children in developing strategies for both understanding and survival. (SM)

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PRE-K-12 MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: MAKING CONNECTIONS: RACISM, MILITARISM AND FEMINISM

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PRE-K - 12 MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION:
MAKING CONNECTIONS: RACISM, MILITARISM AND FEMINISM

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"We are appalled at the present level of the nuclear armaments of the world, and we are profoundly frightened for the future of humanity." (1) This statement, signed by seventy scientists who worked on the creation of the first atomic bomb in 1943, is echoed by Donna Warnock, *Workshop in Non-Violence (WIN) Magazine*. "Feminism is crucial to disarmament because we must dismantle mental - as well as military - weapons." (2)

If one accepts the assumption, the mindset, that humans are intrinsically aggressive and competitive, and that organized military strength is mandatory in the control of society, it is necessary to objectify "them" and to promote and protect "us." The good guy/bad guy Ronald Reagan construct lays a fine patriarchal framework for a society convinced that a "limited" nuclear war is feasible, that civil defense in the hands of "free private enterprise can be made available to those able to afford modular survival shells, allowing the occupants to survive nuclear war in comfort." (3)

What does that really say to financially oppressed people? That they are *not worth saving* in the event of disaster. Not only are they not worth saving, but they are not worth making an appearance as characters with their own culture in the majority of textbooks which serve as the basis for the carriage of culture to young minds.

Young students not impressed in mind and heart by their school's curriculum are likely to be influenced by the media with which they amuse themselves. Video arcade games and television suffused with militarism and violence will help them create their own culture and develop their own values. They may begin to believe the world will not last, that nothing can be done to assure its survival; they may believe that it is necessary to live now, even if one has to use people. If the people to be used are people of color, if they are Jews, if they are disabled, if they are lesbians, their invisibility in the curriculum teaches children that difference and otherness must be shunned.

Issues of revolution and courage resulting from individuals trying to change society for the better are diminished by statements which assert

that "these groups use violence and terror to achieve their ends." (4) Shirley Chisholm, speaking at the New York State Women's Studies Conference in Albany, New York, spoke of the racism "inherent in the bloodstream of America." (5) Women of color are concerned with survival issues; they comprise 89% of the domestics in this country. Do children whose mothers work as domestics find their mothers as role models in their textbooks? Is it revolutionary to want your child to have a better life, to want your child to be educated, even as you may spend your days cleaning the houses, motels, and offices of those who possess more of the world's wealth?

As we learn to actively nurture diversity, individually and collectively, says Evie Beck, author of *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology* (6), we learn not to trivialize ourselves; we learn not to diminish others. Jews, she suggests, live with a collective consciousness of fear. A great part of that fear is the fear of erasure, not only from the face of the earth, but concomitantly, erasure from human history. Elie Wiesel believes that confronting the full implications of the first holocaust has the potential for society's being saved from nuclear holocaust.(7)

We now have one bomb equal to four times all the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Pentagon language for this is "overkill." How many times can you kill a human being? Helen Caldicott asserts that it will require the changing of priorities of our lives, if we love this planet, and wish to save it.(8)

Poet and novelist Alice Walker, in "Only Justice Can Stop a Curse,"(9) writes: "If we have any true love for the stars, planets, the rest of Creation, we must do everything we can to keep white men away from them. They who have appointed themselves our representatives to the rest of the universe. These who have never met any new creature without exploiting, abusing or destroying it. They who say we poor and colored and female and elderly blight neighborhoods, while they blight worlds."

Curriculum development educators who are willing to reconceptualize, to deny old categories of describing the world's peoples, have the opportunity to interpret diversity of cultures and experiences, so that children learn from and appreciate their own cultures, while at the same time affirming and learning from the cultures of other people. Feminist songwriter Holly Near sings: "Children are so tender... they will go to the ends of the earth if they think they are saving a friend..." Children who see *themselves* in the peoples of the world, who do not think difference in another person makes that person an "other," who must be denied, repressed, or put to death, may be the ones to take seriously the words of Jonathan Schell, in "The Choice," from the book, *The Fate of the Earth*:

> Two paths lie before us. One leads to death, the other to life. If we choose the first path - if we numbly refuse to acknowledge the nearness of extinction, all the while increasing our preparations to bring it about - then we in effect become the allies of death... On the other hand, if we... bend our efforts toward survival... making ourselves the allies of life... our vision will sharpen... we will take full and clear possession of life again. One day - and it is hard to believe that it will not be soon - we will make our choice.(10)

Laying the groundwork for the study of global peace in the classroom assists children in developing strategies for both understanding and survival. (11)

(NOTE: Originally presented at the National Women's Studies Association Annual Conference, Columbus, Ohio, June 23-30, 1983, this has been presented at teacher education workshops and in educational methodology undergraduate classes in subsequent years. The author.)

ENDNOTES

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